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DEPARTMENT FOR DAS BRYZA AND EUR/CARC

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [ECON](#) [PHUM](#) [PREF](#) [EAID](#) [GG](#)
SUBJECT: UN DOWNBEAT ON INCREASING ASSISTANCE TO ABKHAZIA

Classified By: AMBASSADOR JOHN F. TEFFT. REASONS: 1.4 (B) AND (D).

11. (C) SUMMARY: In a June 11 meeting with USAID representatives, UN Special Representative of the Secretary General (SRSG) for Georgia Jean Arnault was downbeat on the prospect of increasing assistance to Abkhazia. He said that the current atmosphere is as bad as it has been since he arrived some eight months ago. Arnault congratulated USAID for being able to implement programs "under the radar" which neither side views as threatening. He encouraged the U.S. to continue programming which brings Abkhaz and Georgians together but did not think that a needs assessment study was necessary in order to move ahead with is a wealth of needs, especially in Gali. In a separate meeting with Poloff on June 8, Saakashvili insider Giga Bokeria was deeply skeptical of increasing assistance to the Abkhaz as a way to promote conflict resolution. End summary.

12. (C) On June 11, USAID Mission Director Bob Wilson, accompanied by Deputy Director Andrea Yates, Program Officer Craig Hart and Poloff, met SRSG Jean Arnault to discuss ideas for increasing assistance to Abkhazia. Wilson said that the USG has two million USD to program on confidence building measures in Abkhazia. The U.S. would like to use it to increase the interdependency between the Abkhaz and Georgians but avoid anything that supports the de facto authorities. He cited ideas including enhancing contact between Abkhaz and Georgians, improving the information flow about Georgia in Abkhazia, opening American Corners, and increasing trade between Abkhazia and the rest of Georgia.

13. (C) Arnault responded that the current atmosphere in Abkhazia is as bad as it has been since he arrived some eight months ago. Some staff were even telling him that the situation has not been this bad since conflict broke out in 11998. He congratulated USAID for being successful in conducting programs "under the radar" which neither sides views as threatening. Still, areas in which the Georgians and Abkhaz used to be open are now closed. For example, the Georgians refused to allow UN to train police in Abkhazia unless the training is joint with Georgians. Similarly, the Georgians now believe the EC program for infrastructure development undermines their political agenda. Even Conciliation Resources, he said, had run into trouble with the Georgians for a perceived bias toward the Abkhaz. He did not believe there was much flexibility left to do more than what is being done currently.

14. (C) He said the UN would continue trying to do things that do not set off alarm bells including continuing humanitarian work as well as police and human rights work with a focus on the ethnically Georgian Gali region. Specifically, Arnault said the UN hoped to see what could be done with the newly-established Human Rights Center in Gali. He hoped the U.S. might also provide assistance there. Despite some concern from Georgians that non-governmental organizations in

Abkhazia are not neutral, he believed that the Center could help to bring human rights abuses under control. He stressed the importance of informal contacts between Georgians and Abkhaz as an area of potential continued U.S. assistance focus, especially in the current environment where formal contact is not taking place. He thought that increasing access to outside sources of information, such as the opening of American corners, would be welcome.

15. (C) When asked whether the assistance example of the South Ossetia Economic Rehabilitation Program -- undertaking a needs assessment followed by international pledges of support and supervised implementation -- could apply to Abkhazia, Arnault said he is doubtful that a joint needs assessment, which would require cooperation from the sides, could take place now. He said that the Abkhaz were approaching assistance as a zero-sum game and the Georgians were not seeing assistance in their political interests. Assistance has become politicized, in part by the way that the international community has chosen to sell it: as a way to move forward with the political process. The EC program, he said, has been in place for over two years and the political process remains stalled. As a result, the Georgians are reconsidering their support for such programs.

16. (C) Still, Arnault thought that attempting to continue, and increase assistance if possible, remains a good idea from an humanitarian and a political perspective. He concluded that donors do not have to undertake the political risk (or the time) to conduct a needs assessment to know what to do. There is a wealth of needs in the Gali region especially. A 2004 needs assessment concluded that there would be an humanitarian crisis if nothing is done immediately to fix the infrastructure there. Nothing has been done since that time. He said the trick is trying to undertake programs that are

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perceived to be in the interests of both sides. He noted that the U.S. perhaps more than any other country has been able to stay clear of problems with one of the sides, which every other donor has seemed to encounter.

17. (C) When asked by Poloff about increasing assistance to Abkhazia in a separate meeting on June 8, key Parliamentarian (and Saakashvili insider) Giga Bokeria responded emotionally with a question: what about assistance for the more than 200,000 internally displaced persons driven out of Abkhazia? When asked about reported concerns of the Georgian Government with the EC assistance program, Bokeria said simply that the program is reinforcing the de facto regime. He added that other programs, including Conciliation Resources, simply bring together the same people with immovable views and is not helping resolve the conflict. He suggested continuing programs which bring together Abkhaz and Georgian opinion-makers, such as teachers and youth. He was deeply skeptical about the overall usefulness of economic assistance to Abkhazia as a way to promote conflict resolution.

18. (C) COMMENT: These meetings reflect the challenge of assistance to Abkhazia. Unlike South Ossetia, where the communities are interdependent because of their proximity, the ethnic Georgians of Gali and the ethnic Abkhaz (and Armenians) in the north live essentially independent lives. Arnault's analysis is correct: part of the reason the Georgians have lost confidence in assistance programs in Abkhazia is that they have not seen the programs advance the political process as they claim to do. If anything, positions are more rigid than they were in 2005, when the EC launched its four million Euro program with such fanfare. The EC's ham-handed approach in dealing with the Georgians on assistance to Abkhazia has not helped the situation. In addition, the international aid workers, who are concentrated in the Abkhaz areas of Abkhazia, tend to view the situation as a humanitarian one for the Abkhaz, while the Georgian IDPs, spread across Georgia, remain invisible. As a result, these international workers may tend to adopt a view more

sympathetic to Abkhaz positions. We believe that any successful assistance program in Abkhazia requires careful coordination with the Georgian Government, key members of whom remain skeptical that such programs are helping to resolve the conflict within Georgia's internationally recognized borders -- their primary goal. End comment.
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